

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Digital Students in the Democratic Classroom: Using Technology to Enhance Critical Pedagogy in First-Year Composition

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Students enter composition classrooms in the twenty-first century with various levels of computer proficiency and comfort with technology and digital media. Instructors often make assumptions that their students' are familiar with technology, even though students may be hesitant to use technology in the classroom. This dissertation gathers data from one university class and two community college classes to study students' perceptions of and use of technology, particularly the Blackboard content management system (CMS), in the critical pedagogy classroom. In particular, it studies students' use of technology to reflect on their own work and engage in dialogue with classmates and the instructor. The evidence suggests that students use technology and media cautiously in the classroom and will revert to more traditional forms of expression (e.g., the linear essay) when they feel uncomfortable using technology or they feel that their grade is in jeopardy. Students tended to use Blackboard more for reflection and dialogue when the CMS was an integral part of in-class and out-of-class activities. Findings indicate that first-year composition instructors should reflect on their use of technology to enhance critical pedagogy and make that pedagogy more reactive to students' needs.